

The background of the entire page is a collage of abstract brushstrokes in black and red on a light cream-colored paper. The strokes are of varying thickness and orientation, creating a dynamic and textured visual field. Some strokes are horizontal, while others are vertical or diagonal. The colors are a deep, slightly muted red and a stark black.

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Chris Blackford
April 1989

If you find mistakes in this magazine, please remember that they are there for a purpose. We try to publish something for every one, and some people are always looking for mistakes.

ISSN 0952-6609

The views expressed
in this publication
are those of the
contributors.

5

CONTENTS

Jouissance Frontieres	3
Evan Parker	7
John Surman	13
Little Ladies of the West	16
Iain Banks	20
Something Different	26
Chris Cutler	32

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Jouissance Frontieres

"We have not successfully rolled back the frontiers of the state in Britain, only to see them reimposed at a European level, with a European super-state exercising a new dominance from Brussels." Margaret Thatcher in Bruges, September 1988.

PACING SOCIETY

In the film **The Man Who Fell to Earth**, Thomas Jerome Newton for his own survivalist reasons introduces a series of major innovations into US (aka 'world') culture. The individual innovations are sutured by the enigmatic corporate logo: WE care (World Enterprises). The attachment of this logo to a series of major innovations is observed by one of the film's other main protagonists, Professor Bryce, and leads him to uncover, to trace back the source of these new signs: the foreigner, the alien. Corporate and public authorities also conspire to bring the alien down, as society is deemed to only be able to assimilate a controlled amount of innovation.

In this introductory note to this issue of *Rubberneck*, attention is drawn to a new logo, a new 'corporate' presence of a large multinational operation, that is very active in this region. One that is making Birmingham a truly European city.

The signs are on display all over Birmingham, not in its nightlife, its fast food cultureplexes, brass fittings, or its dockland simulations. The birthmark is on more basic, skeletal works: the city infrastructure. The signs sit like sponsor stickers on the Convention centre, various major road projects. The signs are attached to a massive physical transformation that is taking place in the city. However, this mysterious corporate logo does not lead us to the empire builders of Wimpey, Hanson Trust, THF or NCP; no, it leads us back to ourselves, we own it all, it's the European Community in action. And the sign? 12 gold stars on a blue background.

UNFURL THE FLAG: Katharine, Where Are Your T-shirts Now?

This is a dangerous sign. It is a logo that carries with it a lot of conceptual baggage. It has to be deployed with care; in a way it is the most subversive sign in Birmingham. It is a sign of coming times. Unlike most corporate logos it is not concerned with the 'labelling' of particular products. It aspires, like IBM, to culture; it is claiming its existence, its independence. It is a visual anthem: a flag.

Since 1949 there has been an awareness of the need to give Europe a symbol with which the peoples of Europe might identify. On 9th December 1955 the emblem consisting of twelve separate gold five-point stars on a blue background was adopted. On 29th May 1986 the European flag was officially flown for the first time in Brussels in front of the Commission's Berlaymont building, alongside twelve national flags. On the occasion of the formal ceremony the Commission stressed the importance of this symbol as a means of involving all citizens, in particular, young people, in the ambitious programme of European integration.

CULTURE TOOL KIT

In fact, this visual symbol is just one of a series of cultural tools being used to promote the unity of Europe far beyond narrow commercial criteria. Other measures include the European passport, the European Anthem (the prelude of the Ode to Joy from the fourth movement of the Ninth Symphony by Ludwig van Beethoven), the establishment of a European driving

licence (this will be paradigmatic, just who is on the wrong side of the road: us or them? It might explain why the tunnel has been scaled down to a dreary rail system).

It is also thought in the Commission that the image of Europe would be further consolidated in the eyes of the public if the flag was used at the Olympic Games or at cultural events. The 1992 Olympics in Barcelona coincides with the year that the single European internal market is expected to be secured, and that 1992 consequently has the potential to be remembered as the year in which the significance of the economic, as well as the cultural dimensions of the European Community, come to be defined in terms clearly recognisable to all.

Regarding other 'cultural' symbols, the Commission had made provision for a subsidy of £10K for the expedition which is to plant the flag on K2 (Himalayas), and £9.7K for the expedition to plant the flag at the North Pole. Mount Blanc was appropriated for free. Now we see it in Birmingham, where it cost £203 million.

This extra conceptual luggage is what makes the flag a danger sign. In the UK the 1992 dateline has surpassed it, so that Europe is seen as a single market opportunity for business, a commercial free trade zone, a philistine deregulated dealing house. The present government sees it as such. When there is talk of unity beyond the narrow confines of economics all hell is let loose: Thatcher speaking in Bruges, and recently the head of the Institute of Directors saying that the European Commission is corrupt both financially and intellectually. None of the political right (the 'Bruges group') want the 'social Europe' idea to take hold with its dangerous concern with workers rights, women's rights, and assisting zones that lose out due to industrial restructuring. They reject the idea of the new European company (Societas Europea) with its worker participation; the entrepreneur who cares (exemplified in a lot of ways by Gorodish in the film *Diva*). The sign carries all of these wider aspirations to transcend strictly national interests and prejudices. That is why the Commission recommended that the European flag be flown alongside the relevant national flags of member states. The European flag would be an everyday reminder to European citizens that the Community exists and concerns them directly.

The British government's response to this can be seen if we contrast its approach to the subject of 1992 with that of the French government. In the French TV ads the French government is putting out to alert its citizens to the changes of 1992. The European flag is there next to the tricolour. In the

UK it is invisible. Even on the accompanying brochures it is nowhere to be found. We just have a spectrum of the twelve individual national flags, nothing beyond competing nations in a free trade zone. All that is promoted is corporate *jouissance*.

EC - Intensive Care

The ubiquity of the sign in Birmingham symbolises this extended community ideal. If we accepted Europe as a straightforward free market zone then this sign would not be here in the city. It is only here because of failure. Failure to be an adequate European city (who it is attributed to depends on your politics). Money has come from the Commission to regenerate the city, to bring it up to scratch. Birmingham has been successful in attracting EC funds because "its infrastructures are inadequate and the city suffers from pronounced urban deficiencies". In order to help alleviate these problems the EC has delivered £203m to the region, but it means that the city is on the poor list and needs assistance. Let us hope that the city can get off the poor list and fly (with the nation as a whole) the European flag in a more positive way.

"This flag is the symbol of the real solidarity of the peoples of Europe, the achievement of the close union between them and the respect for human rights and freedoms. Europe must not be viewed as a remote or imperceptible idea by the ordinary citizen, but instead must be a reality accessible to all. Citizens must gradually become familiar with the Europe in which we are living, the progress of which cannot be jeopardised or halted. The flag is the visible symbol reflecting the daily life of all European citizens. It is important for young people to acknowledge the flag as the emblem of a heritage of unity, peace and fraternity." European Parliament, 9.6.88

At present the hardware, the physical infrastructure has been the target of Community regeneration, but the sign also indicates a more subtle project targeting the software or psychological infrastructure of the Community. The government is proving a lot more resistant to allowing that sort of assistance to come from Brussels. Ironically, the Commission will probably only know that its message is getting through when the sign, its flag, lies defaced by (nationalist) vandals. Looking around Birmingham, at present, the signs are still intact. Salut. ●

text : **Ian Williams**



PARKER : the man & his dream

text : **Chris Blackford**

Experimental music is seldom easy. Marketing experimental music must be a considerable challenge, not to say, at times, a considerable headache. Nevertheless, for about seventeen years the partnership of Evan Parker (soprano/tenor saxophones) and Derek Bailey made Incus Records one of the principal European outlets for free/improvised music. In addition to Parker and Bailey's own work, Incus has fostered the pioneering efforts of distinguished musicians like Tony Oxley, Han Bennink, Steve Lacy, Paul Rutherford and a host of other seminal figures on the free music scene. Sadly, the Parker-Bailey partnership is no more and the future of Incus in some degree of uncertainty. The cause of the 'break up' would appear to be bureaucratic rather than musical.

"The theory of the company," Evan explains, "was that we had absolutely equal shares and equal say, but in the event of a disagreement of course somebody has to concede. As far as possible for a long time we ran it so that we didn't have to agree on everything. I did my projects my way and Derek did projects his way; but after a while,

the calculations, the finances, everything becomes so complex that you just can't carry on like that and you need a mechanism for resolving disagreements. And we had no formal mechanism for that."

So, is it a case of once bitten twice shy, or is he considering setting up another company to distribute his own work?

"This is a real nonsense sort of answer, but for the moment I'm enjoying considering my options, and obviously I've got the option of doing what a lot of musicians do which is to try and persuade some big company that they really need you on their books, or you do it yourself. Temperamentally, I feel more inclined to do it myself because I'm very poor at the cap in hand routine. Believe it or not that is actually the way the business works. You'd be surprised how many genius musicians are prepared to go cap in hand to some quite indifferent record companies. When you've been around a long time you need to feel appreciated, understood, wanted, all of those things. Otherwise, it's much better to find a way of doing it for yourself."

Even so, Evan has fond regard for the past, particularly the early years at Incus.

"I'd be kidding myself if I didn't allow a large importance to the records we made early on as factors in survival as performers. Those early records introduced me to key people in different countries around the world and helped to set up contacts with musicians and promoters and people generally interested in furthering this music. There are many people who heard those records and now play this music and make records of this music themselves. The records are like a calling card, your introduction. If people like what they hear they take a chance on hearing you live."

The need for documentation was another function of Incus Records. That an interested listener should be able to trace the development of a performer over the years was of primary importance. However, the free music plot is not as straightforward as one might hope, its roots not entirely apparent. Though the music is centred on improvisation this is not necessarily in relation to themes. Even by today's standards an early free album like **Topography of the Lungs** (Incus 1, 1970) is by no means a cakewalk.

"Yes, this a strange music. It's all very well to talk of this as the extension of jazz or the logical progression from the work of Albert Ayler, Or-

nette Coleman and Eric Dolphy and the key players of the Sixties, but the problem is there's a kind of gap in the fossil record, a missing link. There's a jump from the work of say, Ornette Coleman and George Russell, and from the point of view of the people who I made that jump with, it all happened very suddenly. It was like diving into the unknown, and you can't document a quantum leap like that."

This "jump", that Evan refers to, from the Sixties tradition of free jazz to the Seventies and Eighties *free music* (the term 'jazz' no longer seems wholly appropriate) explains why so many jazz fans still find free music too much of an ordeal, too demanding. Joachim E. Berendt hits the mark when he says that free jazz wants to force us to cease understanding music as a means to self-affirmation. This point applies doubly to free music.

"By self-affirmation in music I mean the way all of us have been listening to music: always anticipating a few bars ahead - and when it comes out exactly (or at least nearly) as we expected we feel confirmed: we note with pride how right we have been. . . the few places where things deviated have simply increased the fascination. . . Free jazz must be listened to without this need for self-affirmation. The music does not follow the listener anymore; the listener must follow the music - unconditionally - wher-

ever it may lead."¹

It needs to be added, however, that this is not some passive follow-the-leader routine. The listener of free music must be an alert and active participant in the creative process, not the passive, somewhat complacent consumer of a finished product wherein pre-existing meaning, put there by the artist, is said to

"I'm not interested in being hot this season with this programme, and next season I come up with something else. Music as *haute couture* doesn't interest me at all"

be concealed, waiting to be discovered by the listener. In the live improvisation situation performer and listener are united as co-creators of meaning and purpose. Structural coherence is *felt* rather than already imposed in a music unplanned and 'of the moment' which has no antecedent or studio reference point against which it can be measured. The listener is challenged to be keenly aware of structure in progress: the digressions, repetitions, conflicts of interest, resolutions etc.

Composer/guitarist, Robert Fripp, is

also worth quoting on this point. In describing his self-styled, one-man 'Frippertronics' ("guitar, Frippel-board and two revoxes") also centred on improvisation, he stresses the need to challenge the "general acceptance of rock music as spectator sport". By limiting the size (between 10 and 250 persons) of this "spontaneous event" and refusing to participate in "the normal vampiric relationship between audience and performer", he invites "the audience to listen actively which places the listeners in a position of equal responsibility with the performer." He goes on to say, "In an appropriate situation with active listening and abandoning attempts to imprison the event on tape or film it is quite possible that something remarkable may happen."²

If, then, there are new demands placed upon the listener, what does Evan think might be the demands upon the musician engaged in improvised music?

"When you're dealing with something that's like an open field it's hard to say whether there are demands. We determine what the demands would be. It's not that there are demands out there, that there was some Platonic existence that the music already had, except perhaps, in your imagination. The demands are created by your imagination, and the musical discipline is to realise those fantasies, or make those fantasies real and

concrete in sound. It's a pretty hit and miss procedure. Your imagination is maybe not as clear a thing as you think it is. There's some feedback between an inspired idea, a fantasy, and the realisation of that fantasy. What you may find, may be slightly different from what you imagine, but your job is to feed back the real information from these attempts and have that modify your fantasy. Sometimes the concrete realities lead the imagination, sometimes it's the other way round."

If this all sounds very metaphysical, then that's probably because it is. Listening to Evan's playing, particularly the solo soprano work on say, **Six of One** (Incus 39, 1980), is to enter another sound world; to be drawn by that seamless, probing tone into a labyrinth of possibility where Eastern drones meet Western atonality and dissolve effortlessly into something unclassifiable.

"It's an honest attempt to find out about something that I don't know about, that I would like to know more about, put it that way. An investigation, an open-ended investigation which could last a lifetime. I'm not interested in being hot this season with this programme, and next season I come up with something else. Music as *haute couture* doesn't interest me at all. Of course, you're more and more pushed that way because people

say, 'What are you going to do this year?' And when you say, 'I'm going to extend the ideas that I've been working on for the last twenty years', how can you make a story out of that?"

Of course, this attitude would seem to be at odds with current media analyses which suggest that we're living in, or on the brink of, a "three-minute culture". The ubiquitous Michael Ignatieff, in the Channel 4 series of the same name, informs us that advertising, television, design reflect a global culture increasingly based on the ephemeral: the ceaseless search for novelty. Newness is progress when contemplation is obsolescence. The thirty second ad narrative replaces the novel; the TV addict zaps back and forth between channels, keeping a dozen Soaps on the go; will Lloyd Webber write the first two and a half minute opera?

"This is it. In a certain sense someone like John Zorn can say, 'I come from the television era. I've got a low attention span.' What he's doing can be interesting, but it's a bit weak. I don't want to speak rudely. . . I just use John because he has specifically said that part of his music is to do with the short attention span, quick cuts and jump-cuts. Which is to say that the meaning is not in the content of any one of those messages in isolation, but in their juxtaposition, in the unexpected-

edness of their durations. My thing is that I'm not much interested in those kinds of juxtapositions. I'm interested in continuity and superimposition inside a continuity. A review I got in the New York Times said that I seem to come from a pre-television era where time is neither here nor there. I quite like that. I'm interested in longer exposition and slow unfolding process."

And finally, without wishing to sound ridiculous: what's next in line for Evan Parker?

"Well, I'd like Impetus to put out the record they've been holding for more than a year now of my trio with Barry Guy and Paul Lytton. And I'm going to do a re-presentation of all the Incus solo records as a boxed set with some supplementary material. Also, somebody in America would like to put out some really old material of the duo I had with Paul Lytton in 1969-70. An interesting band in its time. That would be more of historical interest, certainly to this one guy in America, and maybe to two or three other people. And that's it really. Until Coppola gets on the phone. His kind of budgets. . . I could work with that man." ●

¹ Joachim E. Berendt, **The Jazz Book** Paladin 1983

² Sleeve Notes to **God Save the Queen/Under Heavy Manners**, EG Records 1980



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SQUARING the synth

text : Chris Blackford

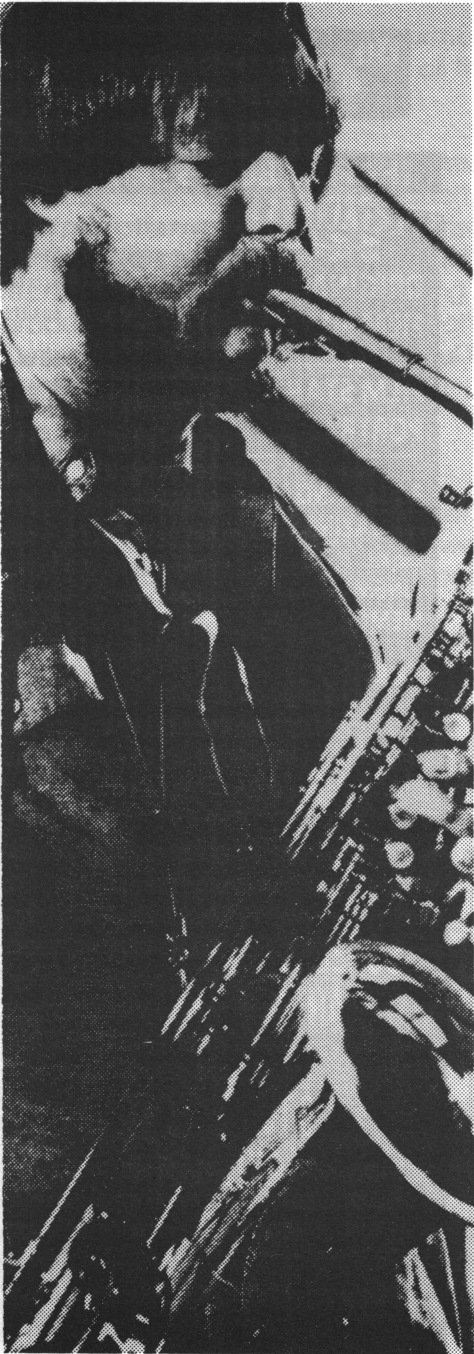
British composer and saxophonist, John Surman, is one of Europe's most distinguished and influential jazz musicians. He is a leading exponent of the baritone and soprano saxophones as well as the bass clarinet. During the past fifteen years or so, the jazz content of his music has been richly enhanced by a growing interest in various world folk musics, together with a sensitive, textural use of synthesizers and sequencers. Surman's experiments in multi-tracking are complex, yet accessible. His tone is full and resplendent, at times lyrical, though without becoming sentimental; his playing has come to epitomise the pure, aestheticized jazz associated with the Munich label, ECM, run by Manfred Eicher, which has so often showcased Surman's work.

It was Surman's interest in electronics and improvisation which brought about the Contemporary Music Network's national tour with American drummer/pianist, Jack DeJohnette. DeJohnette's brilliance as a drummer is now widely acknowledged. Apart from leading his

own band, Special Edition, he has worked with most of the major figures in modern jazz: Miles Davis, John Coltrane, Ornette Coleman, Keith Jarrett and Bill Evans, to name but five. In fact, it was on tour in London with Evans, about twenty years ago, that DeJohnette first met Surman. Jam sessions ensued with the likes of John McLaughlin, Tony Oxley and Dave Holland and a few years later in Woodstock, New York, after one or two gigs with DeJohnette's band, the idea of a Surman-DeJohnette duo began to take shape. However, we had to wait until 1983 for the duo to commit anything to record. **The Amazing Adventures of Simon Simon** was justly awarded the European Record of the Year in the Jazz Forum Readers Poll. Since then, their collaborative work has been more frequent in parts of Europe, though, surprisingly, the 1989 tour is the first they have undertaken in England as a duo.

The tour would appear to be pretty concentrated, thirteen gigs practically in succession, with just two nights off. I should imagine it's difficult to be inspired night after night?

"It's not a surprise, this. One knows it's going to happen, so up to a point you go into training for it. From a physical standpoint it's demanding, so before I start this business I make sure I'm prepared for it, mentally and physically. Unless you



do it in this kind of concentration you don't always get the chance to develop things in quite such a strong way."

How much, in fact, of what yourself and Jack are playing is improvised?

"The basis of the work is all improvised. Since we've been working together now for about two weeks we've started to compose out of things we've improvised. In other words there are pieces that have emerged that we're tending to use as a basis for improvisation, although they vary considerably."

There don't seem to be many free musicians using electronics at the moment. Do you think this might have something to do with some of the excesses of 70s jazz fusion?

"Yes, there aren't that many people using synthesizers in a really creative way that I know. That's what's so fantastic about working with Jack. Apart from being this unbelievable drummer he also enjoys working with the electronics. This is an enormous bonus and probably one of the reasons why we've got this music together."

Would you say there's still this thing about jazz purists not being for the use of electronics even in the late 80s?

"Oh yes, very much so. But what we have noticed is that of course the younger people coming to the concerts, they're not at all concerned with that. They in fact are drawn into the music by the use of electronics. They're used to these instruments at school. There's nothing strange about them, they're just musical instruments, as they are to us, so that problem doesn't arise. It tends to be the dyed in the wool purists, but that, I suppose, applies to all kinds of music, too. I mean, there are those who have hardly accepted anything outside Haydn and Mozart, who probably fill this hall (Adrian Boult, Birmingham) from time to time."

Are you planning to make a record out of the tour?

"We've recorded the whole tour on digital so we're hoping to get a record of the English tour, probably on ECM. If we don't, we'll go into the studio and do something, but it'd be nice to do a live album." ●

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LITTLE LADIES OF THE WEST - Feminine Country & Western as Feminism for the 1980s

The late 1980s have witnessed a wave of critical revivals of earlier cultural products masquerading under the generic pseudonym of 'new'. The 'new morality' (a revival of Victorian values), the 'new graphics' (little more than a reworking of 1920s experimentation in typography), and the 'new country'. This last revival is less easy to categorise as a passive re-working of earlier trends, for though it has re-presented the work of established country and western protagonists to new and younger audiences, it has also brought to light changing and challenging perceptions about what country and western is as a musical genre and the role of women in that genre.

Prevailing definitions of the 'new country' really depend on one's prior knowledge of country and western as a musical and cultural style. To the younger generation of followers, artists such as Steve Earle, Lyle Lovett, Randy Travis and Nanci Griffith are 'trail-blazing' a fundamentally new approach to an aspect of music that has suffered from idignant moral aspirations and Right-wing fervour. Yet, a more critical examination of this new generation of country heroes will reveal familiar and established names amongst their songwriting credits (particularly in the case of Travis),

and concerns and themes in their work that preoccupied an earlier and innovative group of singers. Implicit within the popularity and new-found cultural credibility of country and western music is a recognition and reclamation of earlier protagonists such as George Jones, Loretta Lynn and Patsy Cline. In part the re-identification of figures such as Lynn and Cline has come about through the wave of postmodern 1950s nostalgia dominating mass culture and through film dramatisations of their life-stories. In Cline's case there is another dimension: a growing definition of her as, indirectly, a feminist icon. The extended use of her distinctive vocal phrasing by latter-day feminist singers such as Tracey Thorn and, more crucially, the dominating use of her work in the soundtrack to the film **Desert Hearts** has placed Patsy Cline and her songs of lost or forlorn love affairs in a coherent and pro-active feminist context for the late 1980s.

Perhaps what makes Cline a more appropriate and convincing feminist figure than her contemporaries such as Lynn and, slightly later, Tammy Wynette, are the circumstances of her own life. Despite surface appearances Cline does not fit easily into the feminine country and western stereotype of abject poverty, early marriage, myriad children and divorce and decline. Certainly, she came from a poor Virginian family, but in comparison with someone like Lynn, Cline's poverty pales into insignificance. Her private life was not particularly scandalous, despite the centrepiece given to the problems of her second marriage in **Sweet Dreams**, the filmic account of her life. Rather, Cline's problem was that consolidated success came rather later in life than many of her contemporaries. During the mid 1950s Cline's singing career suffered from bad management and lack of direction. Even when Cline initially achieved success with 'Walkin' After Midnight' in 1957 it was short-lived and she was unable to immediately exploit the popularity of the single. In many respects Cline's early career suffered from her being a woman in a rigid masculine context. Cliched as it may seem, Cline struggled to achieve fame and artistic control over her career, at a time when female singers were predominantly viewed as little more than lightweight vehicles of odes to domestic harmony or unrequited love. It perhaps needs to be remembered that it took figures such as Lynn and Wynette to sing about domestic disharmony and paralleling American feminist theory in its explanation of the feminine mystique, to begin to identify a more active and critical role for the female country and western singer in the late 1950s and 1960s.

A successful career for Cline was established under the tutelage of producer Owen Bradley who recognised that Cline's distinctive vocal style and sliding phrasing deserved a more plaintive and emotive context. Cline's

1960 recording of the Hank Cochran/Harlan Howard song 'I Fall to Pieces' established her as adept at interpreting ballads placed in a country vein. The single reached the top of Billboard's country chart during 1961, but Cline's second attempt at consolidating recording success was disrupted by a serious car crash which left her severely injured. Cline's return to recording after the crash was marked by what has since emerged as her most distinctive and strongest song, Willie Nelson's 'Crazy'.

The success of 'Crazy' was important for Cline for a number of reasons: it finally established her as a major female country star, it clearly bore witness to her strength of vocal interpretations of others' material, and it was a nationwide crossover hit. Perhaps only her recording of Don Gibson's 'Sweet Dreams' in 1963 comes anywhere near challenging 'Crazy' for emotive content and female strength. Contemporary interpretations of Cline as a feminist country singer lean heavily on these two songs; whilst both may appear to be concerned with a certain superficiality of doomed or hopeless love, they counter this (or more particularly, Cline counters this) with a vocal interpretation that turns hopeless idealism into critical negotiation of female dilemma and longing. Of course, beyond such deterministic feminist readings is the purity of Cline's voice itself. It is part of Cline's rise into a cult star of the 'new country' that she was to die before she really consolidated or expanded her vocal ability in the context of such slower and purer melodies.

In essence, Cline's appropriation by feminists is difficult to define beyond reinterpreting her vocal narrative as that of a woman unwilling to fully capitulate to her lover's infidelity or her own emotional isolationism. Singing about topics other than happy marriages and providing for children should not necessarily be taken as a sole criterion for feminist appropriation. Perhaps what makes Cline an apt choice for postmodern feminism is her own persona. To some extent Cline managed to escape the rigid and predictable marketing that accompanied singers such as Wynette and most obviously Dolly Parton. Once she had achieved success (and a mark of her crossover success was that Cline tended to appear without the 'cowgirl' costumes of other female country singers) she also presented a strong and unequivocal presence. The fact that Cline is not defined solely through a country genre, because of her crossover success, not only makes her a more accessible figure, but also one much easier to appropriate. It is interesting that the use of Cline in the soundtrack to **Desert Hearts** constantly accompanies the central protagonist at times when she either debates or hesitantly recognises her own lesbianism.

Cline herself owed much to her immediate predecessor, Kitty Wells. Wells was instrumental in challenging many of the barriers that initially restricted female singers in establishing freedom and creative control over their careers. The subsequent role played by female singers in country and western after Wells, Cline and Lynn has been somewhat marred by indifference. Country and western as a genre fell into a malaise during the late 1960s and early 1970s, settling for a lighthearted patriotism and showbusiness marketing rather than continuing to be a vehicle of individual emotional contradiction and indigenous, yet critical, commitment. Dolly Parton is a classic example. Dominating female country and western during the 1970s (despite of and perhaps as a counterbalance to the crossover chart success of Tammy Wynette), Parton has suffered from becoming a sex object rather than a sexual protagonist. The contradiction of Parton is further compounded by her public persona of male fantasy and private belief in the fidelity and servitude of woman within the context of marriage.

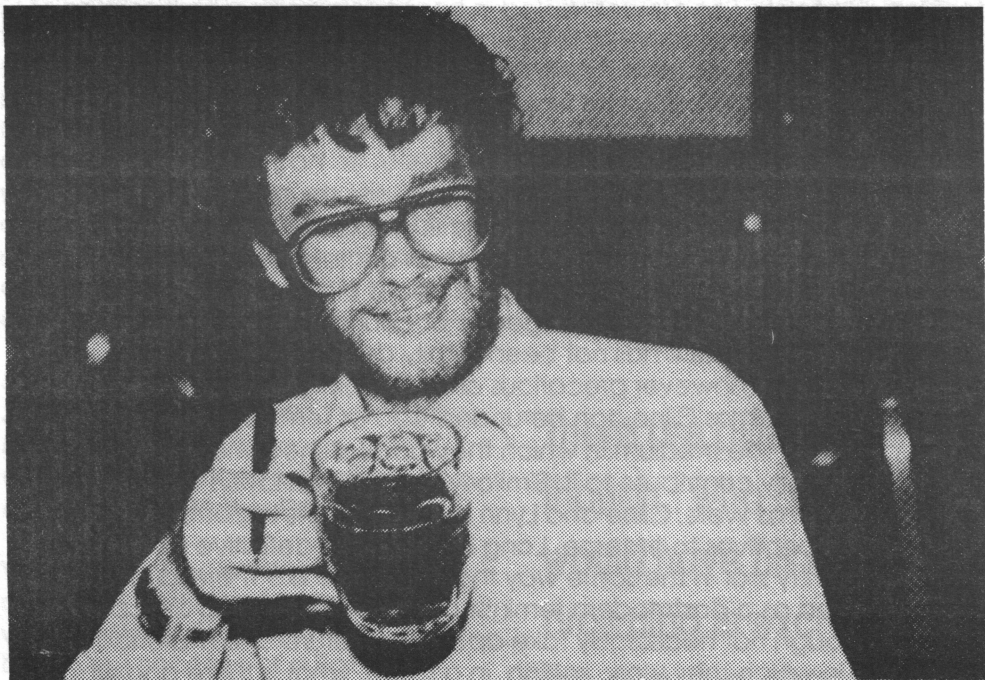
Part of the rise of the 'new country' during the mid-to-late 1980s has been the changing image of female singers. Whilst Nanci Griffith, despite the content and quality of her recording work, fits, albeit uneasily, into some type of objectified image, other singers, most notably K.T. Oslin, present a more forceful and sexually aggressive stance. In many respects Oslin is one of the most important of the new 'breed' of female country stars. Older than many of her contemporaries she represents the woman who, after a youth spent idealistically feminine and sexually submissive, is now attempting to critically examine her own sexuality in the context of feminism and the 1980s. The attraction of Oslin is the way she frames the dilemma of the older woman who wakes up to the sexual freedom of the late 1960s and early 1970s a decade too late. Oslin's preoccupation with '80s ladies' is a very personal, yet, political one. Few other 'new country' female singers follow the same direct negotiation of sexuality as Oslin. Sexuality does surface in the work of Sweethearts of the Rodeo or The Judds, but it is of a more passive and understated nature. The Judds do, however, prove an interesting diversion in this context if only because of the overt on-stage aggressive sexuality displayed by the mother. Yet this, and the occasional sexual provocation surfacing in certain songs, is more or less cancelled out by their Christian commitment to conservative morality.

To a large extent Patsy Cline's persona of the strong woman has been taken up by K.D. Lang, but with a radically different image and intent. Lang's work with Cline's producer Owen Bradley and inclusion of a female country and western 'hall of fame' chorus made up of Brenda Lee, Lorette Lynn and Kitty Wells, on her **Shadowland** album, identify her as a successor

to Cline. Certainly, Lang is well versed in her understanding and opinion of both her precursors and their role as women singers in country. In many respects she does present a strong feminist image, but this is coupled with an uncompromising vocal style which owes a great deal to both Cline and Bradley.

The notion of the 'new country' as finally allowing the female singer to become a legitimate feminist protagonist is problematic. Within the 'new country' it is probably more the context than content which allows feminist labels to be attached. What is significant about the changing perceptions that have accompanied the resurgence of country and western music during the 1980s is that it has not been totally deconstructed to allow feminist readings (however precarious and whimsical) to emerge. In a sense, singers such as Cline can be understood as feminist through an appreciation of the medium in which they appear, how they are placed in it, and what they contribute to it. Similarly, the renegotiation of the heritage of singers such as Wells, Cline and Lynn by K.D. Lang is important as it allows modern perspectives to emerge. Lang is perhaps a definitive postmodern feminist country star in the same way that someone like Theresa Oulton is characterised as a postmodern feminist painter. Both exist to critically explore, though not necessarily take apart, the nature and materiality of the genre in which they work, seeing, in a sense, what is there and what is valuable for women. In this way feminist politics become clamped on top of it. Crucial too, is that such a view of singers, like Cline or Lang, as feminist in a general, or at times personally emotive way, allows the joy of their vocalising to continue without complete demystification. Perhaps women such as Patsy Cline, Loretta Lynn and K.T. Oslin offer a more instinctive, yet powerful, feminist image: of women having to cope within and negotiate from inside the confines of their oppression. ●

text : Janet Ryland



the wonderful
&
frightening world
OF IAIN BANKS

text: Mick and Bernie Evans

Iain Banks was born in Fife in 1954. He studied English Literature and Philosophy at Stirling University and has since worked as a hospital porter, an estate worker, a pier porter at the Clydesdale docks, a roadworker, a dustman, and a gardener. He's travelled to Europe, Scandinavia, Morocco and the USA, and is now back in his native Scotland living in Edinburgh.

His debut novel, **The Wasp Factory**, caused quite a stir with the critics, and rarely has a debut novel provoked such strong feelings, both for and against. Frank, the

central character, lives with his father on a small island connected to the Scottish mainland by a land-bridge. Frank lives in a fantasy world, similar to many adolescent boys, and epitomises the child who pulls legs off spiders and wings off flies, but writ rather older. The difference is that he actually *enacts* his other nastier fantasies, always against other children, and with horrifically fatal results for them, whilst managing to escape without blame. Interwoven with this is the story of his older brother who keeps phoning Frank as he makes his way home from the mental asylum from which he has escaped. There are some truly horrific scenes which have earned the book its 'horror' label; in fact, it deserves a much wider audience. The final chapters are both poignant and revolting at one and the same time.

He followed **The Wasp Factory** with **Walking on Glass** in which he skilfully interweaves three separate stories. The first concerns a couple, in a castle made of glass, whose only desire is to escape. To do this they must win 'games', for which they must first discover the rules, and then answer a riddle which the castle's avain guardian occasionally throws at them. The second thread concerns a labourer who has an uncontrollable anger, and the third concerns a student who falls in love with a rather strange

woman. The threads do come together at the end of the book, but in a manner which is neither contrived nor obvious.

The Bridge had as its initial inspiration the Forth Bridge which is a mere stone's throw from where Iain lived as a boy. It is a complex fantasy in which an entire society lives permanently upon the Bridge where one of the central characters suffers strange nightmares, in some way connected to his waking life. This novel contains one of Iain's most famous characters, The Scottish Barbarian. Having become firmly accepted as a writer of 'hard to categorise but we'll call them weird horror/fantasy' novels, Iain's next offering, **Espedair Street**, was a mainstream novel in the rollicking sex 'n' drugs 'n' rock 'n' roll sub-genre.

Iain Banks has been a lifelong Science Fiction fan and was writing SF long before **The Wasp Factory**. His first SF novel, **Consider Phlebas** was released last year, followed by **Player of Games**, both to critical acclaim in SF circles, and both, perhaps surprisingly, firmly within the 'Space-Opera' range. There *are* differences though: who but Banksy would have his hero drowning in excreta in the opening chapters! In the three years since he entered the wierd and wonderful sub-culture of Science Fiction fandom, he has become a popular figure at conventions and other events, as a

guest speaker, and, more importantly, as a thoroughly likable person. Striding round the corridors and bars of a convention hotel, the familiar tall, brown leather and corduroy clad figure can be relied upon for a pint, a joke, and the odd attempt to scale the giddy heights of the balconies!! And he still owes one of these writers a bottle of champagne.

Some writers once associated with SF, like Christopher Priest, now dislike being linked with it. Do you think it will affect your literary standing, i.e. chances of a Booker Prize?

Yes, but they were fairly minimal anyway, I think. Having started off with **The Wasp Factory** I think I've blown my chances of a Booker nomination in one go. Although **The Wasp Factory** wasn't published as horror, and I still maintain now that it's not a horror novel, it was taken as being one, so I think the idea of someone starting with a horror novel winning or even being nominated for the Booker Prize is a bit dodgy. So, I very much doubt if it's gonna make that much difference really. The two books so far that have been badged as SF, **Consider Phlebas** and **Player of Games**, and I wanted that to be the case, obviously were very much SF. I've always loved SF, so I don't really see anything wrong with that. I'm not particularly bothered about losing intellectual credibility and I'm not particularly impressed with the

London literary scene anyway. So "yes, but who cares!" is the short answer. Edit the rest out if you want.

Yes, I agree with that. I saw Chris Priest and Brian Aldiss debating that point and Aldiss came out very much on the side of SF.

Mm.

" There are differences though : who but Banksy would have his hero drowning in excreta in the opening chapters ! "

I've heard you mention Alfred Bester and Kurt Vonnegut as influences, who seem popular amongst the younger writers. Have any of the 60s writers like Phillip K. Dick or Robert Silverberg had any affect on you?

I suppose Silverberg a bit, for some reason. I don't know why it is. I'm a bit blind to PKD. His stuff doesn't really do anything for me and he's such a well respected author, especially amongst other writers. Actually, Barrington Bayley has

probably had more affect, **New Worlds** in quarterly paperback form and Michael Moorcock, and definitely Mike Harrison (M. John Harrison). Also, non-SF things, **Catch 22** and **Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas** (Hunter S. Thompson).

Well that's put my favourite author to the sword.

" Having started off with **The Wasp Factory** I think I've blown my chances of a Booker nomination in one go "

Oh gosh.

*In **The Bridge** you display a knowledge of late 60s rock music - Hendrix, Grateful Dead etc.*

And 70s.

And 70s. What are your tastes in music?

Well, if you go back through **The Bridge** and take all the tracks I mention you'll get a rough idea of the sort of music I like. At the mo-

ment I'm quite into The Fall, believe it or not. I'm quite a bit behind the times by now, but never mind. I also like a lot of African music. I actually bought Mory Kante's **Africa Beach**. I bought it in Paris which is pretty street cred, eh? Oh yeah, oh God yes, I love The Pogues - a brilliant, wonderful band.

*My favourite book of yours is **The Wasp Factory**, which probably labels me as a loony.*

No, just sick.

Do you intend to develop the character Frank?

I did have one very big plan about three years ago. I was thinking of doing a sequel to **The Wasp Factory** with Frank living as a woman in society. The idea to hang the book on was Frank looking for his mother. It even had a title called **The Lost Wax Method** which just sounded good; you have to be involved in iron foundry, it's a way of founding iron. Also, having spouted off on many an occasion on sequels - I hate people who just milk previous successes - it might look like I was doing the same thing myself. I'd have to do it from a position of strength. I'd have to do it after a book that was bigger than **The Wasp Factory** which might never happen, you know, once I'd done that I could go back to it and it wouldn't look like I was ripping it off.

Also, I'd have to feel the book was a good idea and needed writing on its own merits and not just as a sequel. If you've set up all the background and characters beforehand and you know people like them, obviously it's very tempting for publishers and writers.

Not long ago the NME reviewer, Stephen Wells, said your work was obviously influenced by Douglas Adams. What do you think about that?

No, it's not, really. I read **The Hitchhikers Guide to the Galaxy**. No, I didn't actually, I saw it on TV. No, I reject that, wrong. If he wants to think that I don't feel completely insulted. I think there is that mickey taking thing around with a lot of writers. Terry Pratchett's doing it. I think Terry Pratchett's doing it better than Douglas Adams, and certainly things like the Barbarian in **The Bridge** is sort of a pisstake of **Conan The Barbarian**, or whatever.

But that's just one segment of your work.

Oh aye. I think that thing about about going back and destroying ancient myths. . . in a way, y'know, space opera and fantasy and sword wielding barbarians, it's in the air at the moment and lots of writers are working independently, not influencing each other. It's independent creation, if you like, the mood is around.

How do you see yourself in ten years time?

Probably dead, I suspect.

Alcohol poisoning?

Yeah (laughs), well I hope I'll have my Ferrari, or I'll be breeding it. I dunno. Still writing, but by then I would like to have done some stuff for TV or film perhaps, and also I'd really like to get music on the go. I've had all these songs lying around for years and years and I've never really used them. I've got the music as well as the lyrics. I don't want to be a rock star. I just want to write the stuff.

Where do you see yourself living, in the Outer Hebrides?

Noo, somewhere between Hoban and Fort William. Actually, it's called Appen. It's handy access for the real highlands, lots of nice walks around there and some pubs and hotels and things. Also, it's got two fast roads, very good driving roads that lead to Glasgow and the airport. Dead handy for the rest of the world, y'know, even London. ●

BOWIE - Tonight : Something Different

Bowie's album, **Tonight** (1984), opens on side one with 'Loving the Alien' in a seemingly orchestrated classically western form showcasing the voice. It next pastiches reggae form for 'Don't Look Down' and goes on to orchestrate the Beach Boys' 'God Only Knows'. Eventually, the album finishes with 'Dancing with the Big Boys' which would seem to use an ensemble of traditional jazz instruments which each maintain quite distinct melodic identities in which the voice and its vocal backing are little more than a component. In this way the album develops beyond the defining characteristics of Western music. These characteristics which 'jazz' shares with Eastern musical form are foregrounded through alternate numbers on side two.

It is unfortunately still probably the case that informed opinion in most fields of criticism tends to be dismissive of popular culture being a formally challenging experience. For much of the eighties such a judgement would be very understandable; but below I want to suggest such recent albums of David Bowie as a site of musical challenge.

A SPECULATIVE MUSICOLOGICAL BIT

Most musical form relies upon the subordination of ensemble to some type of leadership, and this subordination would seem to be most evident in the

music of those races who have a history of migration. In other words, the just under three quarters of the world's population which is not Chinese.

We could identify this with the recent sociological appreciation of the way militarism could be the essential component of the social form of most human societies.¹ But that would be beyond the scope of this article.

From reading Dave Rimmer² it might seem that besides Bowie, Malcolm McLaren must be the other major influence upon the form of popular music since the mid-seventies. He created the Sex Pistols and at least partly discovered Adam Ant and Boy George who were initiators of the early eighties hegemonic trend that has become known as 'New Pop'.

McLaren proposed Burundi African tribal drumming to Adam Ant, and punk in as far as it was not parody, was very like speeded up reggae in its reliance upon a kind of organising throb. 'African' formal organisation has been common in popular music this century. Tribal form must be able to prompt successive elements in routines of some co-ordination. Rehearsal of such enhanced the probability of tribal military survival.

'Fashion' on Bowie's earlier **Scary Monsters** album has something of the Sex Pistol's taste for parody about it when it takes on the disco fad that was contemporaneous with punk. The bored voice almost mutters the instructions for some banal disco routine so that it sounds like an imitation drill routine. Fashion has something of *fascion* about it.

NEW POP AS WESTERN MUSIC

But harmonic music seems to have originated in the chants of Western tribal ritual. This basis is well illustrated by the harmonic chants and battery of electronic instrumentals in 'Fashion'. What is now called Western music is distinctive for its development of harmony which would seem to coincide with the Church of the dark ages extending the range of voices in their chants to include different pitches.

The musical forms in the West that stand out against this general formal tendency are flemenco and those aspects of rock we are focusing upon here. They do this in the way that they resemble what can be broadly called 'Asian music'.

The form and texture of the instrumental backup in these song forms resembles traditional Chinese music. The parallels stem from a priority of

melody and rhythm, a lack of harmony, and delicate chamber music style based upon the self-assertion of all the musicians involved in distinct individual separate contributions.

This brings us back to the early eighties. New Pop took up a taste for pastiche displayed earlier by those such as Roxy Music, and turned it into multiple, often microscopic plagiarism through 'sampling' technology. This could have been used to set up multiple musical identities in a number; reproductive technology becoming a dynamic loop in a circuit of artistic production such as Brecht's ally Walter Benjamin advocated in the thirties. Culture Club has been most careful to fit their borrowings together so that the joins don't show.

RACIAL STRUGGLE

Rock and jazz like the fourteenth century developments, flamenco and what is now called 'Indian music' were forged in the racial confrontations where vocal comprehension has been impaired.

The twentieth century interest stemmed from the shock of the white ear confronted with the sound of the Black American. Indian music really emerged with the minstrels working in the differing dialects of the sub-continent after the classical Sanskrit culture had been overturned by the Moguls. Vocally, both these developments would use expressions that were meaningless (European flamenco was developed by the gypsies who were themselves Indian migrants and used forms that had been sucked up from the Arab empire).

Bowie's **Lodger** (1979) had presented a similar trajectory of development away from the Western. The dust cover contains much distinctly Asian imagery. The album includes 'Yassassin' which takes the form of a Turkish folk song; but it must be recognised that 'D.J.' and the concluding 'Red Money' herald the more libertarian developments later seen in **Tonight**.

THE VOICE

The elements of the aural complex that occupy a relationship of subordination within a larger pattern in Bowie, are the voices. Bowie's basis as an individual performer allows him the possibility of avoiding the tendency to vocal harmony in rock/pop that was reinforced by the success of the Beatles. While Bowie has backing vocals, his own voice is prominent on

them, which often gives the vocal complex an echoic quality. Yet, at the same time many Bowie songs have to rely upon the combination of voices to keep the vocals from becoming just another element in the aural plurality. This is well illustrated in 'Neighborhood Threat' at the start of side two of **Tonight**.

When Bowie puts verbal flow in the musical foreground he can make it almost outlandish with a distinctly English voice. This can begin as he slips between levels of address when sometimes he makes statements and then slides into mumbling. The diction can sound as if it has a sense of flow until you read the lyrics on the dust cover.

Modernism was interested in the relationship between verbal and coherent flow (e.g. Imagism and Vortecism). Rock began as an almost incomprehensible black voice being played on white radio stations in Chicago in the early fifties. The Sex Pistols made themselves vocally outlandish, but knowledge of what was parodied reassured you of the nature of the verbal flow when parody was used. We find a more serious challenge with. . .

THE MONSTROUS. . .

By contrast, Bowie's earlier **Scary Monsters** (1980), closer to the punk era, is more disturbed in character partly because of a kind of adolescent throw-back quality, which at the same time could be said to be a re-statement of the satisfactions of Western musical form.

Monsters begins with 'It's No Game' which rejects some of the defining characteristics of Western music. For a start the lyrics - declaimed rather than sung - are in Japanese and the instrumental accompaniment does not have an overall musical identity. This album later involves Pete Townshend, Robert Fripp and Roy Brittan as guest performers who are allowed to show off. The album closes with musical accompaniment recognisable from the opening track but now clearly harmonised in one musical identity which serves to showcase the voice.

Yet, one cannot say that even side one closes without returning to the West. We have already noted a para-military form to 'Fashion'. This is preceded by the thematically decadent 'Ashes to Ashes' which relies upon synthesizer. These have a tendency first displayed on the instrumental B side of **Low** (1977) to inevitably set up an orchestrated monolithic melodic/rhythmic identity however ornamented. These two numbers close side one.

EXPERIMENTAL POTENTIAL

In summarily comparing basically two albums we have noted how Bowie tends to use a very Western style for exploring issues of decadence, and an Eastern form in a libertarian celebratory manner. This article has explored this polarity because it would seem that there is further room for experiment in these directions with musical technology in a popularly effective manner. ●

text : **Andrew Lydon**

¹ Editorial. **Peace Review** No. 1 Winter 1989

² Dave Rimmer. **Like Punk Never Happened - Culture Club and the New Pop** (1985)

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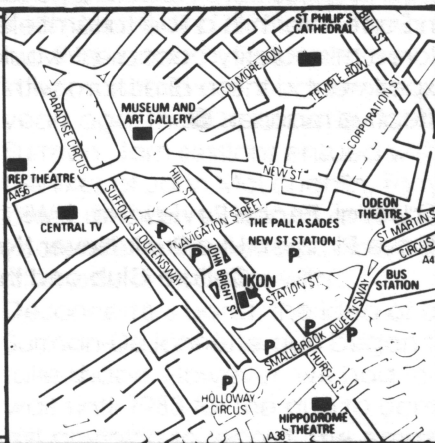
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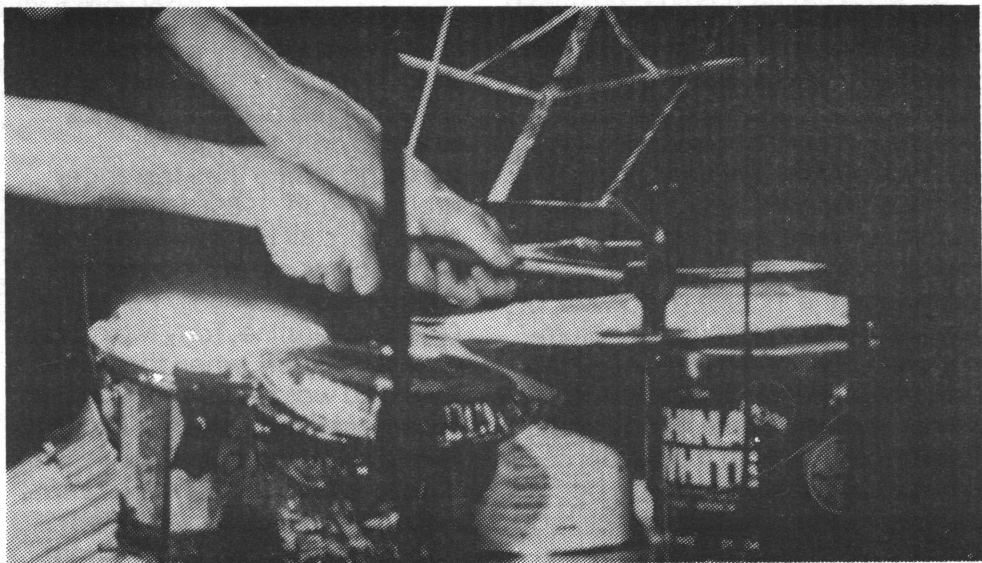


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the european musician cometh

text : **Chris Blackford**

fifteen and a half was a very tender age to be exposed to Henry Cow: first at 45 rpm, then five minutes later, amidst profuse apologies, at the recommended 33 rpm. Rock music would never be the same again!

For the sake of brevity, though, we'll skip the whys and wherefores of the group's origins and get straight to the point. For about half a dozen years (from the cosmic pyrotech-

nic of ELP and suchlike to the half-baked rantings of seminal Sid) Henry Cow recorded a handful of albums, unprecedented and unparalleled, in the history of British rock music. Certainly, 'Saucerful' Floyd and Soft Machine, before the departure of Robert Wyatt, paved some of the way, but neither stretched the rock form with quite the same sense of sustained adventure as Henry Cow. The group that made its debut with **The Henry Cow Legend** (Virgin,

1973) cast a deep, historical net, trawling elements, most noticeably, from 60s free jazz and early 70s free music, as well as noise experiments worthy of Luigi Russolo and the Futurists of the 1910s and the late 60s group AMM. Far from being shackled by the influence of such illustrious forebears the group's own distinctive personalities emerged, in particular, the incisive guitarwork of Fred Frith and the boundless drumming of Chris Cutler. Five years later the group released its last studio work, **Western Culture** (Broadcast): largely pessimistic in mood; dense, compressed textures broken occasionally by the now familiar spirited alto-bassoon bursts of Tim Hodgkinson and Lindsay Cooper. The ground covered had been considerable, though the various facets, composed and improvised, (including the Weill/Brecht, Eisler/Brecht-influenced songs, featuring Dagmar Krause, later to be explored more rigorously by the Art Bears group and most recently by News From Babel) are representatively suggested on the live double album, **Concerts** (Caroline/Virgin 1976), an ideal introduction for the interested prospector.

Since the Henry Cow days Chris Cutler has been an inexhaustible presence on the US/European experimental music scene, both as a performer and as a promoter, working with a remarkable range of fellow travellers from Heiner Goebbels and Alfred Harth in West

Germany to the Residents and the various Frith-led projects in New York. When Ohio's Pere Ubu was stopped in early '82 Cutler contributed to three of David Thomas' extraordinary solo albums, including **Blame the Messenger** (Rough Trade, 1986), which he also produced. By this time, the group of musicians assembled around Thomas was essentially Pere Ubu (Allen Ravenstine, Tony Maimone); no surprise then, when the name Pere Ubu was revived for **The Tenement Year** (Fontana, 1987), effectively the group's comeback album. Mind you, the rock climate had changed dramatically since the frenetic activity of 1976 from which the group began to build its cult-like following: a far cry indeed from the stagnant industry now presided over by a partly reconstructed 30 year old recluse and a pubescent soap starlet.

Who would remember Pere Ubu five years on? There were certainly plenty of blank minds in Birmingham where that leg of the 1988 tour had to be cancelled, presumably due to lack of interest. And there were one or two blank minds of a different kind at the Town and Country Club in Kentish Town for the boisterous last night of the tour where a glass-throwing incident (at David Thomas!) put paid to the encore, leaving DT with no option but to usher the group off to the safety of the wings.

"It's quite interesting, in that when we were the Wooden Birds, basically the same people, people treated us in a very different way. Now that it's Pere Ubu and the moment they hear the first dulcitol tones of 'Non-Alignment Pact' there's a lot shouting and screaming, and that's quite a new thing. And I don't think Ubu is resting on its laurels, either. We're doing a lot of new stuff. It's different when you're a musician and you're working in this field. You don't really think about what's fashionable and what the political climate is unless you're trying to be 'popular' and trying to figure out what that means. If you don't care and you just want to do what you've been doing all along anyway, then that's what you do. It's just like The Residents; they were working for five years and nobody took any notice of them when suddenly they were big news. They didn't change, it was the climate that changed."

A safer (one hopes), though no less stimulating current project is with Les 4 Guitaristes De L'Apocalypso-Bar, featuring guitarists Andre Duchesne, Rene Lussier, Jean-Pierre Bouchard, Roger Boudreault and Cutler himself on drums. Their first album (the second, we understand, is imminent) is a rich and varied Abercrombie to Zappa of the guitar, so to speak: highly imaginative and restlessly unpredictable. 'Des Murs, Des, Murs Et Derriere. . . La Lumiere' begins with a typically austere Henry Cow rhythm, complete with

searing Frith-like guitar, runs up against one or two Fripp counter-punches before disintegrating into the sort of bewitching tangle we associate with a Derek Bailey or Henry Kaiser - then on again to something else. Like I say. Rich and varied. Chris Cutler tenders this functional description of the group:

"It's a guitar quartet. Four electric guitars. It relates to instrumental music of the 60s and it relates to Jimi Hendrix and guitar music right across the board. It's charming, it's interesting, sometimes quite complex. It's like a string quartet. At the moment we're playing compositions internal to the group, but we've commissioned pieces, like a string quartet would, from Fred Frith and Lindsay Cooper and various other people, and we'll be doing them next."

Forgive the hyperbole: Cassiber has been the most exciting experimental 'rock' group of the decade! The line-up reads like a European super-group: Chris Cutler (drums/percussion, texts), Christoph Anders (vocals, synthesizer etc), Heiner Goebbels (piano, electric keyboards, guitars) and Alfred Harth (saxes, clarinets etc). As with all projects involving Cutler the music is intelligent and ultimately unclassifiable. Cassiber's genius is its versatility; the versatility of its multi-instrumentalists, and the ease with which they operate within a jazz/rock/electronic/ethnic nexus. Though not as fashionable as the work of the

New York avant-garde, currently spearheaded by John Zorn and Arto Lindsay, **Man or Monkey** (1982), **Beauty & the Beast** (1984) and **Perfect Worlds** (1986) bear witness to Cassiber's singleminded pursuit of a new aesthetic based on the subtle interplay of conventional acoustic/electric instruments and the latest electronic software.

'Miracolo' from **Perfect Worlds** (minus Alfred Harth) is indicative of their appealing range; this one combining sampled African voice with Anders' biting, near-operatic vocals ("Well, meat is better treated than the poor who can't afford to eat it."), accompanied by sparing piano and what sounds like flourishes of treated marimba. Sleeve notes to **Man or Monkey** explain the working methods: "Our idea was to go to the studio with only a body texts to use if, where and when Christoph was moved. . .but to improvise all structures and arrangements."

Chris Cutler elucidates, further: "In the beginning you discover recording and what it can do. First of all you use it as a documentary device. Then you realise you can use tape in a different way and you can compose with it. Henry Cow did that on **Unrest**. We would do improvisations and then turn them into compositions by using overdubs etc. So, the next logical step was to try to improvise compositions so that they sound like they are written pieces of music, like songs. And they do; but, in fact, we have



made them up on the spot. So, you have a kind of consciousness of structure which is also a consciousness of tape, how it's going to sound on the tape. And that was really Cassiber's project. Of course, we use state-of-the-art stuff like samplers because you want anything that gives you access to more kinds of sounds.

"The Futurists, with the Art of Noise, were talking about the ability to use the sounds of factories and aeroplanes and warfare etc. Now we can do it. Samplers allow the musician to reprocess the sounds of everyday life in an aesthetic and musical way. The fact that samplers are usually used to rip off other peoples' drum sounds is neither here nor there. The technology is not at fault. It's effectively neutral; it's how you use it."

As you can imagine, these strategies have taken Cassiber way outside the ambit of most rock-based groups. One wonders whether they still have much interest in, or use for current rock music?

"I don't like very much contemporary rock music, that's true. I think the roots of rock music are the roots of Pere Ubu, are the roots of Cassiber. Cassiber is nothing if it's not a rock group in essence; because of the collective way we use improvisation, the way that we use volume and electric instruments, and this basic kind of idea of expressiveness

which doesn't come from jazz, but rock. I think more to the point, the question is: is what's in the Hit Parade these days, rock? It's not that we don't find anything interesting in rock any more, we're the ones still following along that line, still doing rock music. It may be that a lot of today's pop music has deviated from that line and has become so much *pure product* that it's lost touch with the roots of rock. No, I still think we've got our umbilical cord attached to rock. I've never done anything else. I wasn't classically trained and I didn't play in jazz bands. I started off playing Shadows and then R&B and trying to play like the Yarbards and Pink Floyd and so on."

As stated, Chris Cutler divides his time between performing and promoting experimental music. There's a lot of time driving between gigs when he's able to listen to tapes groups from all over the place send him.

Recommended Records (RR), based in Wandsworth, UK (branches in Switzerland, West Germany, France, Italy) was set up by Chris Cutler and Nick Hobbs in 1978 as a federation with three main functions: mail order, distribution, and record label. To date RR distributes music from BRD, France, USA, Belgium, Japan, Canada, Czechoslovakia, Poland, GDR, Hungary, Yugoslavia, Spain, Norway, Africa, Mexico, Greece, Switzerland, Swe-

den, Denmark, USSR, Italy, Holland. .
 "There's stuff happening everywhere," he says, optimistically. "It usually doesn't get much of a chance, but there's stuff happening everywhere."

RR grew out of Rock in Opposition (RIO) which brought together Henry Cow (UK), Stormy Six (Italy), Etron Fou Leloublan (France), Univers Zero (Belgium), Samla Mammass Manna (Sweden), and later Art Zoyd (France), Aksak Maboul (?) and Art Bears (UK). As an RIO festival booklet declared: "National borders do not matter any more. The struggle is between classes and ideologies and not nations."

"RIO developed out of the fact that because Henry Cow was English we were able to go on playing in all these European countries and be treated seriously. We represented a particular kind of use of rock instruments which was to do with bringing into rock elements from free jazz and elements from twentieth century classical music, not nineteenth century classical music like Yes, Genesis and Emerson, Lake and Palmer. We were interested in composers like Schoenberg and Edgard Varese. We were into modernism and still are. And there were lots of other groups making the same kinds of experiments, but because they weren't English or American nobody would even listen to them. "A French rock group? Do me a favour!" In fact, if

you ask me who the two most important groups of the Seventies were I'd probably say Faust and Magma, a German group and a French group, in exact parallel to electronic music and *musique concrete*.

"Anyway, rather than just complain about the fact that records weren't getting distributed or these groups weren't getting gigs we organised a festival in London, called it RIO and organised festivals in other European countries. As a formal organisation it didn't last more than a year and a half, but what came out of it was the idea. People still talk about RIO and describe themselves as being RIO groups as if that were an existential category that defines a position in relation to everything else. And secondly, RR came out of that. In fact, all the things that RIO did are now done by RR. It acts as a focal point, a centre for the dissemination of information."

In the last but one RR catalogue one sensed a touch of despair. RR were clearly concerned about record sales declining and generally people not taking a chance on experimental music.

"There's not really any despair. I don't despair. It's true that sales have gone down, and it's true that things are getting harder, basically because of the economic depression. It's necessary to press home the point in the catalogue. A lot of

people think it doesn't matter; maybe I'll tape this record or borrow it some time. People don't understand how small companies like ours depend on people buying that record. When your sales get below 400-500 copies of a record it's not any longer economically possible to continue. RR lost money for years and runs by the skin of its teeth. I think things are no better or

receptive are promoters in this country to what he's doing?

"This country is the hardest for anyone to play experimental music in. All the groups that we distribute come over and do European tours. For example, Wondeur Brass, a women's group from Montreal, played all over Europe but not in England. We had to fight tooth and



worse than they've ever been for our kind of music."

Apparently, West Germany is now the centre for free music, is that the case with the music you're involved in?

"Yes, certainly Germany. In my time I've seen the centre of interest in progressive or experimental music shift from England in the late 60s, Holland in the early 70s, in the mid-70s it was France and in the 80s it's been Germany. Now Germany is tailing off and we're waiting to see where it's going to be next."

And what about England. How

nail to get the ICA to pay a miserable amount of money for After Dinner to play here: an incredibly good group from Japan and still no one was interested. It's intense apathy and economic depression, these things together. It's also about affluence. It's a case of when people feel secure they'll try things out. When people don't feel secure they stick to what they know. And now they read the Sun and that's a measure of the political climate in this country.

"This country's full of grabbers, people who are quite happy to see everybody else go to the wall. It's a pretty negative climate so you

can't expect much public support for things which question the status quo, which question consumerism. People want to consume, it makes you feel very secure. You go home and you know what you're going to listen to, you know what it's going to do to you, you're getting what you paid for. If that's what you want, that's what you'll get. The country gets the government it deserves."

There's no doubt that Chris Cutler's dedication to experimental music over the years has been quite remarkable considering the meagre funding usually available and the media's largely indifferent attitude to non-commercial musics. Is there perhaps a hint of evangelical zeal in this dogged enthusiasm?

"No, I don't feel like an evangelist. I don't think somehow we have to convert these decadent English into liking our stuff, because I think that's a bit arrogant. You either like it or don't like it. I don't want to force anything down anybody's throat. At best, we might have kept. . .there's a strong wind blowing and it's a very small flame and it needs someone to protect it, to keep it burning through the night. And so, if we've done anything we've done that. We've tended this little lamp and we've kept it going. And we continue to keep it going. It's there if anybody wants this little bit of light, this little bit of heat, there it is. And that's the way I see it, not anything beyond that." ●

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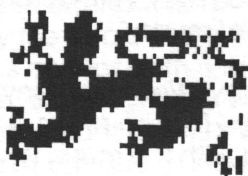
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